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A surge in the number of illegal border crossings in Germany

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According to data published on 23 June by the Federal Police (*Bundespolizei*), whose prerogatives include border protection, 35,877 unauthorised entries into Germany were recorded between January and the end of May this year. This figure is 60% higher than in the same period last year. According to press releases (*Die Welt*), the *Bundespolizei* registered 1389 illegal border crossings on the Polish-German border in January, 1040 in February, 1584 in March and 2427 in April. According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, 27% of all the illegal entries took place on the border with Poland from January to mid-June.

In turn, the German-Austrian border in Bavaria was illegally crossed by 1375 people in January, 843 in February, 1225 in March and 1234 in April. In total, this accounted for about 17% of all illegal entries into Germany. In Q1 2023, around 3000 illegal immigrants entered Germany through Switzerland (15% of all unauthorised entries in this period), and around 1500 (7%) through the Czech Republic.

Table. Illegal entries to Germany from selected countries in Q1 2023

Border state	Number of unauthorised entries	Share in the total number of unauthorised entries to Germany
Poland	4013	20%
Austria	3443	17%
Switzerland	c. 3000	15%
Czech Republic	c. 1500	7%

Source: author's own estimates, based on data from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, after *Die Welt*.

Federal Police data for 2022 reveal that 15,198 people entered Germany illegally across the German-Polish border (around 4600 in the first half and 10,600 in the second half of the year). This accounted for 16.4% of all unauthorised entries. Last year, the highest number of illegal crossings was registered on the border with Austria (22,800, or 24.7% of all unauthorised entries), the Czech Republic (16,000, or 17.3%), Switzerland (10,400, or 11.3%) and France (5500, or 6%). At the same time, 12,300 people (13.3% of all illegal crossings) entered Germany illegally via airports.

Commentary

- The increase in the number of unauthorised entries to Germany is partly an effect of the intensifying wave of illegal migration at the EU-Belarusian border over recent months. According to the latest data from the Polish Border Guard, the number of attempts to illegally cross the Belarusian-Polish border exceeded 12,000 in the first half of this year.

Hence the noticeable upward trend compared to last year; almost 16,000 such incidents were recorded in 2022. All indications are that Minsk (in agreement with Moscow) is deliberately escalating migration pressure, both in view of the July NATO summit in Vilnius and as part of the broadly understood joint Russo-Belarusian policy of confrontation towards the West. In addition, there are plans to resume the air connection between Minsk and Baghdad; flights will be available twice a week July through October. This raises the risk that the upward trend in the number of illegal immigrants from Belarus will continue.

- To accurately assess the data on unauthorised entries into Germany, one should consider the terrain and the length of its borders: for example, the border with Austria is 784 km long, with the Czech Republic it is 646 km, and with Poland it is 467 km. It is also important to bear in mind whether permanent random checks are being carried out at the border, as this ensures more effective detection of illegal attempts to cross the border. Such checks were introduced on the German-Austrian border in 2015. CDU politicians, especially the interior ministers of Brandenburg and Saxony (both members of that party), have called for a similar tightening of the border regime with Poland, the Czech Republic and Switzerland. The federal interior minister Nancy Faeser (SPD) has opposed these moves, arguing that this will cause unnecessary complications for the significant number of Poles and Czechs who commute to work in Germany.
- Demands for radical measures to curb migration are most often raised in the eastern federal states. This is a result of both the increasing number of illegal border crossings and the AfD's pressure on the federal government. This party sees the demand to curb migration as the most important political project which has repeatedly boosted its ratings. Since elections are scheduled in Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia next year, this topic is gaining significance.
- Germany has received one million refugees from Ukraine alone, and migration from other directions has also surged in recent months (by around 80% y/y). Therefore, federal states and local governments, whose prerogatives include providing essential care to refugees, are putting more and more pressure on the federal government to curb migration. There is not enough space for new immigrants in the country, and social conflicts over the distribution of wealth are becoming increasingly frequent (see '*Dispute over funding refugees' residence in Germany*'). 77% of German citizens are of the opinion that politicians do not pay enough attention to the problems caused by the settlement of foreigners in Germany. In addition, the majority of respondents (54%) believe that immigrants generate more costs than profits in Germany.